

Glendenning Wyndham Frederic Brodie 'Glen'

28th February 1931 - 3rd April 2021

The last day of February 1931 came with snow. Fred, the postman from Little Walsingham, was making his way home to his wife, Ruby, in their bungalow in East Barsham. Ruby was an assistant school teacher at the village school (later to be headmistress), a woman of indomitable spirit and firm views.

Fred, was a veteran of The Great War having lied about his age to sign up at just 17 years old, he had served with the Royal Norfolk Regiment at the Battle of the Somme. Shrapnel from shell fire which struck his left shoulder and chin ended his war and he lived with a permanent disability.

Things were brighter by 1931 though, as he made his way home that day, Ruby was about to give birth to their second son. He would be a younger brother to Travers and, in time, an older brother to Vernon, Melvyn and Elga.

So it was that Glendenning Wyndham Frederic Brodie or, as he preferred just Glen, came into this world amidst the snows of 28th February 1931.

The following day, three and half miles away in Fakenham, another expectant father was making his way, on foot, through the knee deep snow to fetch the midwife from Sculthorpe. Hours later, on the 1st March, the midwife safely delivered Connie Spurr¹ into the world, a birth that would come to have great significance for Glen.

Glen's early life would have been familiar to generations that had gone before, with no mains water, gas or electricity, as there was in nearby Fakenham, water had to be fetched in two buckets from the well fifty yards away - for a family of seven this meant frequent trips, especially in summer! Lighting came from oil lamps and cooking was done on a coal fire cooking range which also supplied the hot water for washing.

The traffic was, in the main, horse drawn farm tumbrils. The meadows and River Stiffkey were a big attraction for Glen and his brothers; paddling and fishing for minnows.

The family grew vegetables, they kept chickens, and sometimes rabbits and dad described walking the Snoring Road to gather sacks of hogweed to feed to their rabbits.

A little further up their lane his maternal Grandmother, Emma², and his Uncle Frank lived in a 'bungalow' made from two converted railway carriages.

Between the ages of 4 and 9 dad was already developing his love of games; 'Ball and Rope' at school and Cricket at home. His father was no doubt responsible for his fondness for sport, Fred was himself an excellent billiards player and claimed to have been a 'fast and tricky' footballer before injury³ and the war! On the playing field at the back of their bungalow he would place pennies on top of the wickets for his boys to bowl at and if they knocked them off they were allowed to keep them.

By the time dad was 9 the Second World War had begun but this didn't seem to impinge on his lifestyle too much with dad having few recollections of the war beyond his father's time in the Home Guard, and an occasion when a night time air raid left his father cruelly incapacitated with a stubbed toe⁴ - but perhaps most potently he recalled running across the fields to meet his father on his way home from work one day, to be greeted by a clearly shaken man and the grave words 'France has fallen!'. He admitted that seeing his father so concerned was the only point at which the reality of the war really imposed itself on his childhood.

During the war and his first year or two at Fakenham Grammar School dad used to go with his father to watch his elder brother, Travers, play for the football and cricket first XI's on a Saturday afternoon. At that time he regarded the first XI as, his heroes or certainly his role models.

Dad enjoyed his time at Fakenham Grammar School - mainly because of sport.

His academic career was unremarkable, and the fact that he received a good level of education was as much down to his mother's force of will as it was his own endeavours. By his own admission his enthusiasm for sport did not help his academic performance - 'my mind was too much on sport and too little on lessons and homework.' he later admitted!

By the time he became a 4th former he was in the first XI for football and cricket himself!

Once in the 5th form - in which he spent 2 years trying in vain to pass the school certificate - he was school captain for both the football and cricket teams!

During those teenage years dad also worked on the local farms and helped with harvests, working with horses, he toiled in ways that would have been familiar to farm labourers through the ages. Dad recalled rising early to be at work by 7 O'Clock on the farm and seeing all the other village men going to work. 'The village seemed a strange world at that time in the morning' he said 'a bit unreal, a little bit eerie, but also a little bit magical and special.'

After school national service beckoned in the RAF.

His father went with him to Fakenham station to see him off when he was due to report to RAF Sealand for basic training. Fred had bloodshot eyes and puffed busily on the cigarette that hung from his lip as he struggled to disguise his emotion.

I'm sure dad hated being away from home and family but as a good sportsman he was well equipped for military life and actually came second in the 'best new recruit' award.

There was of course football and cricket in the RAF too, and recently from his hospital bed dad told me how his RAF pals nicknamed him 'Hoss' or more often 'Butch' because he could kick a football so hard.

In October 2017 dad and I were coming home from the football past Norwich Railway station (we'd lost 2-1 to Derby and were in reflective mood). Dad told me how he used to come home at weekends from national service and sometimes would get to Norwich Station at 2am. He would ring his Aunty Lily and head up to their house in Warwick Street (off Unthank Rd) The next day he would get a train to Fakenham and get home to Barsham about lunchtime.⁵ The following day, Sunday, he would have to go back. Dad said to me 'It was just nice to have a night at home.'

Mum and dad had known each other at Fakenham Grammar School, but it wasn't until October 1951, when dad finished his national service and then found a job, working in the stores, at British Field Products, in Egmore, that their paths crossed again.

It was in the early spring of 1952, just before their 21st birthdays, that dad found himself making a phone call from a telephone box in East Barsham, to mum at the office at BFP. According to mum, although dad claimed no recollection of this, the first thing he asked her was not to shout, presumably so that the other girls in the office wouldn't overhear her response when he asked her out. Mum agreed to a trip to Fakenham cinema. Dad told us that they didn't actually go to the cinema in the end, but spent the evening walking about Fakenham.

Towards the end of mum's life they enjoyed talking about those very early days in the spring and summer of 1952. In particular they recalled how mum would take the bus to work from Fakenham, and how dad would cycle there from Barsham. Every morning the bus would pass dad on his bike, (he was undoubtedly late) and every morning mum would wave from the window, as would - no doubt enjoying his slight embarrassment - all the other girls from the office travelling with her on the bus.

Dad married mum at Fakenham Baptist Church in July 1954.

They lived with mum's parents at 7 Kings Road when they were first married and it was there that Joy was born on 1st June 1955. Soon after, mum and dad and Joy moved into the first home of their own - a flat in Fakenham. Regular visitors to the young family included dad's youngest brother, Elga, who would call in whilst on his lunch break from the bank, and take a turn rocking Joy's cradle.

By the winter of 1957 the family were living in a house at Hillside, in East Barsham, and it was here, on 6th November, that mum gave birth to Angela.

By 1960, mum and dad and Angela and Joy had moved to Boston in Lincolnshire where dad was working as a Legal Assistant for the council. And in December 1961, Keith arrived.

Throughout these years dad continued to love to play football and cricket, and represented Fakenham at both - and later played cricket for Thetford.

But playing for Barsham was his first love and we were raised on tales, not just of their exploits on the field, but of a richness of characters from village life; Eric Curtis or 'Crack' their cricket captain and his brother Tom, Geoffrey Waites or 'Bang', and 'Tinny' Moore - a well known poacher once accosted by a Home Guard patrol fearing he was German paratrooper.⁶

Then there was Jimmy Skelton who came a cropper alighting from his cycle, whilst still in transit, just 100yds from his home gate. The crotch of Jimmy's saddle had become caught on his saddle and he ended in a heap on the road. Dad's father rushed to his aid and was greeted with the phlegmatic words "I were nearly home, won't I Fred!"

Dad shared with his brothers a dry, irreverent sense of humour which was typified by an incident one Sunday morning. Dad and Travers were in church before the start of the service, when the Rev Hand (a quiet hesitant man), came up to Travers and said "Er, Travers, I wonder if you would mind very much taking the collection round this morning?", to which Travers, casting his eye around the gathering of 8 or 9 worshipers, replied "What, all the way round?"

By early 1963 the family were keen to return to Norfolk and dad placed an ad in the Eastern Daily Press 'Conveyancing manager seeks position...' Mr. Crisp Snr. of Rudlings responded and there was another move, this time to Thetford, to a newly built house, number 50 Redgate, where the family would live for the next 15 years.

The family was complete in July 1969 when I was born.

We all regarded 'the Redgate years' as a very happy time. There were friends for neighbours and with our mum, and most of the other mums at home much of the time, it was a wonderfully safe and happy place for the family to grow up.

We recall the warmth of family Christmases when mum's parents would always come to stay, and dad's old Barsham Utd. football socks would serve as stockings for Father Christmas - black and gold or blue and red - complete with holes for presents to tantalisingly poke through! Utterly magical! But also more ordinary times such as Saturday nights after the football when dad would return from Mr Dubock's sweet shop with the Pink-Un newspaper and some chocolate. Dad loved to reveal the headline in the Pink-Un, and we were treated to classic puns such as 'Hot Cross Bone Day' When Jimmy Bone scored twice for Norwich on Good Friday!

In the early 1970's with dad's own playing career over and Keith at a suitable age, the two of them began to attend home games at Carrow Road. Dad was always a Norwich City fan, as was his father before him, and from the late 1930s they attended odd matches together, along with his brothers.

The early 1970s, however, marked a shift as Norwich were promoted to the top league for the first time and dad, Keith and then myself, became regular fans and then season ticket holders from that time until the present day. Dad took us to the football as boys and we, in turn, took him as an old man.

His grandson Jonathan recently recalled a trip to Carrow Road with his grandpa '...it was touching how what seemed like the whole lower River End said hello, nodded their heads or asked him how he was doing as we got to our seats.' He remembered.

This is exactly how it was at every home game in his later years. It was as though the Duke of Edinburgh had arrived - our row would all rise, and he would shake hands and have a word for each of them, whilst Keith and I followed along like his equerries! Most of those fans didn't know his name and we discovered they referred to him as just 'the colonel'!

His other grandson Josh confided to me the other day 'I'm glad grandpa introduced me to Norwich City...although there have been some times I've questioned that...' He added 'What a great man. I will miss him!'

By 1978 the family needed a bigger house so we moved to Nunnery Drive, where mum and dad both loved the view across the common, and were again lucky to find good neighbours in Shirley and Phil who were very kind and helpful, particularly in recent times, and David Reeves, who dad loved to talk Norwich City with and who he missed dearly when David passed away far too young. Dad said that he could remember the first day he woke up in Nunnery Drive, he walked down the stairs and couldn't believe the house was his!

Mum and dad made a wonderful combination as parents. Mum adored small children and had a real gift for caring for them, whilst dad's almost endless patience and calm good sense came into its own as we grappled with our teenage years and the transition to adulthood.

Angela recalls how he made countless trips to Lincoln when she couldn't settle at college there, and Joy recollects how he helped her and Clin decorate their first home - including sawing the wrong end off a door, which needed adjusting - apparently he was mortified!

Together mum and dad were our rock! It seemed that there was no situation in life to which dad couldn't apply a helpful cricketing analogy: "It's like when you go out to bat' or "It's like facing fast bowling' or my personal favourite 'it's like when you play and miss'. Apparently he offered these metaphors as readily to the girls as he did to Keith and myself.

Dad had known tough times himself, losing his elder brother, Travers, when dad was just 50 hit him terribly hard. Dad loved all of his brothers very much and losing Vernon and Elga in the years since mum passed away made for a tough few years at the end of his life.

He showed himself to be more stoic than any of us had imagined he could be and he bore it, as he had done mum's decline, with a quiet dignity that was the mark of the man.

In those last years the family drew close around him to provide the care he needed and to fill the enormous void that mum had left in his life. Barely a day went by that he didn't receive a visit from one of us and of course his grandchildren brought him great pleasure and comfort... Hannah, Jonathan, Jen, Josh, Jo and Merryn. And not forgetting little Eva whose arrival brought such joy into his final years. It was so sweet to see them together!

He was also fortunate to enjoy the support and friendship of his carers Rachael, Sue, Carrie, Amy and Phyllis, who I think became as fond of him as he was of them. And also Liz from King Street Baptist Church who provided steadfast fellowship and companionship. Mum and dad's long association with King Street Baptist Church (since 1963) is also represented today by Tim, who was minister there at the time of mum's passing and dad subsequently described as '...a good friend to me!'

Dad was a remarkable man, he loved to tell a story and he loved words and he loved language and he could write an excellent letter - a skill he made sure to equip the four of us with.

Dad was a man of great integrity, he was a kind man, a gentle man, but also a strong man, and he taught me that those things should go hand in hand.

The four of us can genuinely say we never heard him say a bad word about anybody! Especially not his brothers. A quality not well represented in his children I must admit, but something we must all now aspire to.

On the day dad passed away his sister-in-law, Grace, observed that 'He was always the voice of wisdom and kindness.' A sentiment his children whole-heartedly concur with.

That voice is now silent and it will be as sorely missed as he himself will be. And so it behoves us to ensure that voice is still heard in the time to come.

1. Later Connie Brodie - Constance Mary, married Glen 17th July 1954
2. 'Gaga'
3. he suffered a knee cartilage injury before the war which with, no NHS, stopped him from playing
4. This is the incident when German bombers were lighting up the night sky and nana was calling to Pop "Fred come and look at the lights-quick!" To which he replied 'I can't, I've stubbed my bloody to!'
5. The 3 and half miles would have to be done on foot or by cycle. It was common then to ride one cycle and push another and I suspect Pop would have done this and met him at the station and then done the same on the Sunday, this time pushing the spare bike home whilst riding his own.
6. I don't know the Home Guards concerned but this is the occasion when the patrol shouted 'Halt! Who goes there?' No reply came. They tried again 'Who goes there or I'll shoot?' they said. Finally, from the darkness came the reply, not thankfully in German, but in broadest Norfolk 'You darsn't!'